



**Montana Department of
ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY**

SENATE NATURAL RESOURCES
EXHIBIT NO. 9
DATE Jan. 26, 2009
BILL NO. SB 101

Brian Schweitzer, Governor

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SB 101

**Department of Environmental Quality Informational Testimony
Senate Natural Resources Committee
January 26, 2009**

The Department of Environmental Quality is the state agency that administers the Montana's Water and Wastewater Treatment Plant Operators Act. Currently, the statute requires certified operators in responsible charge of water treatment, water distribution, and wastewater treatment facilities.

SB 101 would add the requirement for certified operators in responsible charge for all community public wastewater collection systems serving over 3,300 in population. The Department estimates that 30 Community wastewater systems will be required to have a certified collection system operator as a result of this bill. Large communities in Montana employ staff who are primarily responsible for monitoring and maintaining the collection portion of the wastewater systems. Under current law they are not required to be trained and tested as certified operator. Many of these individuals and others have indicated to the department that they would like a certification program developed specifically for their field.

In addition, the proposed change would add language to allow for a voluntary certification of wastewater collection system operators for all systems in Montana. The voluntary program would be administered the same as the non-voluntary requirement and would require passing an initial test, annual renew, and continuing education, but would not be mandatory.

Having properly certified and trained operators for wastewater collection systems would increase public health protection and assist wastewater systems in meeting permit requirements established to protect the environment. These folks would be required to pass a proficiency test to demonstrate their knowledge of system operation and maintenance. Every two years a certified operator would be required to obtain continuing education credits to assure that they are staying current with their knowledge. The certification of this group of workers would recognize them as professionals in their field.

This is not a new approach and nationally other state certification programs have already been certifying wastewater collection system operators. By developing a program in Montana it would aid in maintaining the expensive collection system infrastructure and allow reciprocity of certified operators between Montana and other states. The Governor appointed Water and Wastewater Operator Certification Advisory Council has reviewed and approved this proposal.